

PRESS RELEASE

House Armed Services Committee Duncan Hunter, Chairman

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OPENING REMARKS OF CHAIRMAN DUNCAN HUNTER

Full Committee Organization – 108th Congress

Let me first welcome all members – returning and new – to the House Armed Services Committee, 108th Congress edition. It is a great honor to sit in this chair and know that I will have patriots like Bob Stump and Floyd Spence literally watching over my shoulder as we proceed in the years ahead. We have a full schedule today, so I will not take a lot of time on opening remarks. However, there are a few brief observations that I believe are in order.

As Chairman, it is my intention and pledge to continue this committee's longstanding and bipartisan tradition in the furtherance of a strong national defense. The security challenges facing our nation stand in stark relief as we confront the global war on terrorism and the evolving challenges in Iraq and elsewhere around the globe.

At the same time, our defense establishment has reached a critical crossroad in terms of balancing the risk of trading near term combat power for the promise of new and enhanced future capabilities. While many of us have and will continue to fight in the trenches for the resources necessary to minimize the need for such a difficult choice, the upcoming defense debate will largely hinge on this question.

These are important issues that we cannot afford to get wrong. In this business, miscalculations often result in the needless sacrifice of dedicated young Americans who will always answer their nation's call to duty. So, the task of all of us on this committee – Democrats and Republicans – is to treat this assignment with the seriousness and dedication that it deserves. The opportunity for politics as usual will always be there. But on matters of national security, I am confident we can continue to demonstrate an ability to rise above the customary debate and concentrate on what is truly important.

To accomplish this goal, you can expect the committee to be very busy and engaged in the months ahead. At 2:00 p.m. this afternoon, we formally launch our review of the President's defense budget program for the coming fiscal year. This process and the dozens of hearings and briefings involved usually keeps us busy all the way through the springtime. You can expect the same this year, but given the significant and immediate national security issues facing the nation, we will also need to simultaneously stay focused and engaged on current events and emerging policy questions.

Working with my friend Ike Skelton, I will provide members with a general planning schedule of committee activity in the next few weeks. No matter how you slice it, we have a lot to do and I welcome any all member ideas and participation in the many issues we need to cover.

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